

Educational Psychology

Considering EVERYTHING we have studied about issues related to diversity, what have you learned in Ed Psych and how will you use it in your classroom?

In Educational Psychology, I have learned that one of the fundamental considerations in education today is the issue of classroom diversity. Cultural diversity affects the way students learn, and therefore, the way teachers must instruct. Such diversity can either enrich a classroom or destroy it, depending on the way the teacher's attitude and approach. It is the teacher's job to differentiate his/her instruction and give every child an equal opportunity to succeed. As a future teacher, I plan to apply what I've learned in Educational Psychology to foster learning, growth, and success in each of my diverse students.

Cultural diversity results from membership in different groups, such as nationality, social class, gender, race/ethnicity, and religion. The groups a student belongs to influence the way he/she thinks, acts, and learns. For example, Asian students tend to be highly collective in their learning whereas American students tend to be more individualized. Boys tend to excel at math and science while girls perform better in English. Some students learn best through pictures and visuals while others are auditory or hands-on learners. In any case, as a future teacher, I will need to be sensitive to different learning styles, while also being careful not to stereotype student abilities according to cultural differences. Stereotyping students can be just as dangerous as ignoring cultural differences because stereotype threat may cause students to perform below their ability levels, based on the teacher's expectations.

One of my greatest challenges as a teacher will be to establish equality for all students. Throughout history and continuing today, race, social class, and gender have contributed to

inequalities in education. For example, until the *Brown v. Board of Ed* court case in 1954, colored students were considered inferior to white students and were forced to go to separate, schools. Conditions in these schools were anything but equal school funding, educational opportunities, good teachers, and building projects were unequally dispersed in favor of the white schools. As a result, the quality of education was much lower for colored students, and the implications of this can still be seen today. African American students almost always score lower on standardized tests and have a higher drop-out rate than white students. Also, students with lower socio-economic status tend to be less successful academically than students with higher status. Many lower class students have parents that both work fulltime jobs. As a result they have little time to help their children with schoolwork and may place less value on education. Also, the schools in poor areas are likely to be less advanced, more run down, and hire less capable teachers than their wealthy counterparts. Finally, gender differences contribute to inequality in education. For hundreds of years, quality education was much more available for males than females because boys were seen as the more intelligent and likely to hold jobs that required an educational background. Today the tables have turned and girls have taken the lead in education. A higher percentage of girls than boys go to college, graduate, and go on to grad school. A higher percentage of boys than girls are enrolled in Special Education Programs, drop out of school, and have legal problems. Because inequalities abound in these three areas, teachers have a huge job to do in leveling the playing field and ensuring that all students are learning.

My study of classroom cultural diversity has provided me with much insight and ideas for handling diversity in my future classroom. First, I must look at diversity as an opportunity rather than a problem, a resource for learning rather than for conflict. In class we used the analogy of a

leaky bucket versus a full bucket to represent this idea. The class provided me with several ideas for celebrating diversity in my classroom. I could decorate my classroom with posters and artifacts that are unique to different cultures, use instructional material that equally incorporates a variety of ethnicities, and have my students compare and contrast their culture with someone of a different cultural background. I learned that I must adapt my teaching style to meet the individual needs of my students. This may involve spending extra time after school helping a student whose parents work full time or designing a science experiment rather than giving a worksheet to benefit hands-on learners. Finally, as a future teacher I must avoid stereotyping my students because of their cultures. Every student deserves an equal opportunity to learn and succeed.